

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

Candidate:

Serena Fortenberry

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

After 16 years, Maddox has no strategy to address crime. Reactionary maneuvers don't reduce crime. I support a multi-faceted plan emphasizing prevention via educational initiatives, strong urban planning, community policing, recruitment/retention of patrol officers. This offers a forward-thinking integrated approach.

Our city wastefully spends thousands of our taxpayers' dollars. As Mayor, I won't need a chauffeur or bodyguard. I won't throw away public money on bad real estate investments. I won't waste money on poorly planned projects. I won't waste millions on useless consulting contracts. I won't waste money development incentives without prioritizing spending on infrastructure.

Residential/economic growth depend on Tuscaloosa's ability to support growth. Maddox hasn't maintained or expanded the city's water/sewer/transportation infrastructure as required to promote development. Tuscaloosa is at a severe disadvantage and paying for years of reactive management rather than proactive growth. I will undertake systematic, comprehensive infrastructure maintenance and upgrades, supported by prioritized funding.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

Our downtown lacks adequate parking. It lacks adequate lighting to provide safety for pedestrians. Outdoor dining in our climate is popular and yet remains a rarity in our city. Stronger urban planning that incorporates CPTED principles, especially along secondary streets, will expand the vibrancy of downtown life into areas that have not yet seen the effects of downtown investments.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

Diversifying our economy is critical. We must recruit knowledge-based industries in engineering, hard sciences, and research/development. I propose convening a taskforce with the county and University to create a research/development park, and together incentivizing knowledge-based firms and industries to locate here.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

I recommend fully funding and expanding the Tuscaloosa County Economic Development Authority to create specialized divisions for industrial recruitment, knowledge-based recruitment, and corporate headquarter recruitment, each led by a nationally recognized talent.

I would utilize all statutorily available means, including tax districts, to promote Tuscaloosa's development of a diverse and robust economy, as other areas of the State of Alabama have done.

I would work with our partners in the County and local municipalities to achieve these goals. Maddox has reduced funding to TCIDA and sought to control TCIDA to the exclusion of others. As other areas of the State have shown through economic recruiting success, working together with our neighbors as partners will make us stronger, not weaker.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

The eyesore McFarland Mall site needs redevelopment.

Maddox has supported incentives for private industries to promote the social and economic well-being in the City—for hotels, retail development, and industrial development for manufacturing companies and Mercedes suppliers.

Now, Maddox has bet Tuscaloosa's financial future on "experience economy." If the City is going to bet its future on experience economy, it needs a first-class athletic venue.

Just as with other business interests, we should be working with a private developer who is willing to construct an experienced based center. Such a venue will bring thousands of visitors to Tuscaloosa. It will bolster tax revenues and promote development/redevelopment in south Tuscaloosa.

Redevelopment of the site is about economics, creating opportunities, and better quality of life for citizens. Currently sports-plex conversations are fractured, driven by political maneuvering not common sense and teamwork. The best site for such a development is arguable being blackballed because of the owner. Emotions and personalities shouldn't interfere with what is best for our city and citizens.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

PARA can and should be a model organization. I do not believe the current Mayor's intemperate rages against PARA, nor his recommendations to cut PARA funding, is designed to improve PARA.

Lack of a strong, sustainable funding model has forced PARA to annually beg for funding, placing PARA on weak economic footing, and preventing PARA from strategically implementing continuous improvements and preventative maintenance.

I will prioritize implementing a new financial model for PARA, working closely with the County and other municipalities. Under current leadership, these relationships have also suffered and weakened.

Additionally, reinvigorating the PARA board with new appointments—fresh sets of eyes and ideas—will help revitalize PARA and make its programs better reflect the desires of citizens throughout the City.

We need to reset our attitudes toward PARA, stop focusing on WHO controls it, and form collaborative relationships with partners and stakeholders to create the best Parks and Recreation Authority in the State of Alabama.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

I publicly opposed Elevate because the tax increase hurts our vulnerable citizens who receive little in return. I opposed Elevate because it is not a plan but a slush fund for the Mayor to dole out contracts to friends and shift monies across budgets. Elevate is used to pay all sorts of line items. It also pays for new parks, rather than fixing/expanding our critical infrastructure necessary to promote real economic development.

Passing the increase was accompanied by no companion vote on any plan or structure for accountability. Prior, the mayor didn't educate taxpayers by providing data support for his projects. There are no assurances for how and why the ever-changing projects will deliver returns for our city.

If we want to reduce crime and have a high quality of life, and create an environment necessary to recruit and retain intellectual capital, corporate headquarters, and knowledge-based industry, Elevate must fully fund pre-K education, currently enrollable only through application. Our poverty and crime rates are unacceptably high. Robustly funding public education will deliver returns to Tuscaloosa in safety and prosperity. Combining this with judicious, data-supported, investment in capital projects will "elevate" our city more responsibly and profitably.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

Yes. providing commercial air service to and from key hubs for a variety of airlines, will help recruit and retain new knowledge-based industries, corporate headquarters and opportunities for the University of Alabama to promote academic conferences. It will also facilitate UA's recruitment of out-of-state students from large metropolitan areas across the country, as the prospective and actual students, and their parents, will be better able to fly directly campus via KTCL rather than through Birmingham. If Golden Triangle Regional Airport in Columbus, Mississippi, can support commercial airlines, then Tuscaloosa should be able to do so as well.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

The City should provide taxpayers with clear explanations of each of these budgets and explanations for the transfer of funds from one budget to another. Currently, the budgets and the transfers in and among these budgets is akin to a shell game, and each budget should be itemized to facilitate the public's understanding of the shell game.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

My professional career requires sharp critical thinking, desperately needed in City Hall. I will think critically about what is best for our collective well-being rather than for the political well-being of Maddox and the financial well-being of his friends.

I am disciplined in developing, managing and sticking to a budget. My family has no debt. I will mind and protect the public's tax dollars because I don't believe in borrowing my way to prosperity. My husband and I have borrowed only when necessary, paying our debts as quickly as possible. I would love to build the same road to prosperity for Tuscaloosa.

I carefully weigh different ideas and perspectives. I will listen to all the people of Tuscaloosa and work with City Council to move Tuscaloosa forward in a manner that promotes all districts in our city.

Maddox styles himself an expert in crisis management. The frequent shootings in our city are crises. Maddox's crisis management arbitrarily and capriciously shuttered small businesses. Worse, while our schools, stores, County, Northport, and Courthouse are open, Maddox has kept City Hall closed for months. A fresh set of eyes, critical thinking, disciplined financial management, are needed to lead Tuscaloosa into the future.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

First, understand that I do not want to be the Mayor of Tuscaloosa in 10 years. I believe in term limits. I will not serve more than two terms. I also do not envision myself as governor, senator, or any other political position. That is not my aspiration. My focus is solely on the City of Tuscaloosa.

I hope to lead the City in a smart, financially responsible way, working with our partners and our people, to make our City a great place to live, work, and play.

In ten years, I want Tuscaloosa to be a stronger city, with efficient government operations, a diverse and thriving economy, where our citizens earn a living wage, and enjoy life in quality housing with well-maintained, expanded, and reliable infrastructure. I want to protect our natural resources, including the Black Warrior River and Lake Tuscaloosa. I want to support residential development, and the highest quality residential life. In ten years, I want all of our citizens, regardless of age, color, creed, or religion to prosper in our city through good jobs, arts, athletics, and the outdoors.

Candidate:

Martin Houston

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

I see our three main issues to be addressed in Tuscaloosa as:

- Business and Economic Development--we need to actively and aggressively recruit, support and develop a diverse range of companies and businesses, with special emphasis on knowledge and tech-based businesses. We need to be more active in leveraging our local knowledge base, especially our Colleges and Universities, to aid in this.
- Educational Excellence--we need to work diligently to help the Tuscaloosa City Schools progress so that they (a) have NO failing schools and then (b) are one of the best school systems in the state. City Hall needs to support our School system in every possible way to make this happen.
- Safe and Secure Communities--People need to know that they and their families are safe, and I've developed and released a City Safety Plan to address how we're going to work with our Police, Firefighters, Emergency Medical Personnel and our 911 Center to give them the safety they deserve. Please see my web page for more information about this. I'll be happy to address your specific concerns about this issue should you have any after reading my plan online.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

There has been significant growth (until COVID, of course), but we need to work with local businesses and the downtown area as a whole to bring more than just more hotels to downtown. We particularly need to expand business opportunities to bring more family-centric options to downtown, especially in the entertainment area.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

We need to be more active in leveraging the knowledge base of our institutions of higher learning to recruit, support and develop the businesses that can hire their best and brightest graduates right here in Tuscaloosa, rather than seeing them have to leave the city where they were trained to find the jobs they want at competitive salaries. The first step in this process is having a Mayor who is determined to make this a priority, and I intend to do just that as Mayor.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

McFarland Mall is prime real estate for Tuscaloosa, and something absolutely needs to be developed there to introduce people to the great city Tuscaloosa will become under my administration. As to exactly what the 'something' should be, I believe that we should investigate a wide range of options so that we can choose the one best suited for the location and our city. I'm open to a public-private partnership in developing the site to its fullest potential, but I do not believe the city should risk overextending itself by being the sole owner/developer/manager of that 'something'.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

Parks and Recreation are key to what I want to see in terms of improving the quality of life for our citizens, especially for families. Riverwalk-type projects have been proven to help economic development, so we should keep this in mind when considering what current support for our parks as well as future development should look like.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

I believe the city should continue to work with PARA to enhance and improve their functionality, including looking into permanent funding to better serve the existing facilities as well as developing new opportunities for expansion.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

I have no direct objection to any of the Elevate Tuscaloosa projects themselves, but in these difficult times (when COVID has had such a dramatic effect across all sectors of our economy) we need to be very much aware of the need to prioritize them. My biggest concern with Elevate Tuscaloosa was the undue burden on that 24-plus percent of our citizens who are below the poverty line. The sales tax increase portion of Elevate Tuscaloosa has created a great gap and hardship for these most vulnerable of our residents, making it even more difficult for them to meet their needs and pay their bills.

I support keeping Elevate Tuscaloosa funds separate because that was the original understanding and agreement, as the people were told, and any changes in that initial agreement should be put back before the Council, and probably subjected to a vote by the people of Tuscaloosa.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

I absolutely support efforts by our city to enhance the capabilities of the Tuscaloosa airport, not just from a commercial/passenger standpoint but also for recruiting the Amazons, UPSs and FedExes of the world so they could land their aircraft here. With that capability, we greatly increase the probability of this type of company building distribution centers and other facilities here in Tuscaloosa, creating good-paying jobs and generating significant amounts of tax revenues.

That more and better commercial air service is also another tool in recruiting more businesses to come to or open in Tuscaloosa is also something we can not forget.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

Each separate budget has its own unique challenges, but my overall philosophy will guide my administration in every case: We must work diligently to see that every single tax dollar spent gives us the maximum value, and each must be spent with complete transparency. We will set a budget plan that establishes best value and maximizes transparency, then stick to that plan

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

unless there are clear and compelling reasons to deviate from that plan. I will apply these principles to every budget across the board.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

Insurance is always a large budget item for any city, and my years of experience as an insurance agent give me a detailed, personal knowledge about the insurance industry that I will use to maximize the value of the taxpayer dollars we spend on insurance for the City of Tuscaloosa. Additionally, my business experience gives me a deep wealth of knowledge about finance, and as CEO of Tuscaloosa, I will ensure that each Department Head is conscientious about how, when and where they spend the people's money. My Leadership and Empowerment experience will be used to develop the transparent, welcoming, high-value services City Hall provides to all of our citizens.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

My vision is for a unified, diverse, growing and thriving city that isn't just a 'college town' but one that also has a wide range of business opportunities, many different types of industries, a Top 5 school system with NO failing schools, low crime and high safety ratings. In other words, I want Tuscaloosa to be the best city in this state, if not the nation, for people to come to to live, work, worship and raise their families.

Candidate:

Walt Maddox

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa (City)? How should those issues be addressed?

Economic recovery from COVID-19: In coordination with local partners, the City will support local vaccine distribution as the Alabama Department of Public Health makes it available. Restart Tuscaloosa will be our economic recovery blueprint. Its \$15 million investments into small businesses, infrastructure and public safety have kept our community moving. Our infrastructure and economic development efforts must continue.

Public Safety (juvenile crime) – There's been a double-digit drop in our Big 5 crimes since I've been mayor, while our population increased 25,000. But juvenile crime is up. I have asked stakeholders to join us in Project Unity to address causes of this troubling trend. Please see www.tuscaloosa.com/unity

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

Infrastructure Investments – Working with the Chamber, we have developed robust infrastructure investments through TCRIC and Elevate. Favorable interest rates and lower construction prices mean now is the time to advance. The City’s strong financial position allows us to move forward with many road projects.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

Continue to advance the East and West Strategies – For every dollar of public investment within the downtown corridor since 2006, there has been three dollars of private investment – We know this works!

To the west, we must continue to move forward with the completion of River District Park, MLK/JWP, Western Riverwalk, and Saban Center. To the east, we must complete the University Boulevard Corridor Project from 19th Street to Stallings Avenue.

Rapid Transit – Funded by Elevate, and schedule for implementation in FY 2024, we will build a rapid downtown transit system for major events and the busy nights, vastly improving accessibility, convenience and safety of those coming downtown.

Tourism Partnership – We have moved the needle in downtown thanks to the public/private partnerships. To do more, we need to be laser focused on attracting both large and micro events to the downtown core.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

Our administration continues to move our community into the knowledge-based sector. The first crucial step was Elevate with its investments into arts, parks, recreation, airport and rapid transit. 68 percent of Millennials and Generation Z’s will choose their community before they chose their job. With UA and Stillman College producing thousands of graduates per year, Elevate provides us the ability to take full advantage.

Speaking of UA, we are building strategic relationships in the areas of water resources, transportation and cyber security. These disciplines have great potential to spin-off private sector development.

Mercedes-Benz provides a strategic opportunity to bring electric vehicle and autonomous vehicle development to our region. The City and University are currently in a partnership with testing autonomous vehicle technology in our infrastructure. This field is emerging, and we have put a true stake in the ground.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

When it comes to any investment for the City, we must meet these conditions: (1) Return on investment; (2) Return on community; (3) Sustainability.

If the City decides to explore the possibility, then beyond meeting these conditions the process must be transparent to ensure accountability.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

For years, I have been clear that the funding and management model for PARA is broken and unfair to the taxpayers of the City of Tuscaloosa.

I believe that our parks and recreation system needs to be taken to the next level if we want to recruit and retain graduates from Stillman College, Shelton State and the University of Alabama.

In the last several years, I have worked to bring the community together to address the structural funding and management issues with PARA that have been decades in the making. If those issues are not resolved soon, then the City will have to assume more and more responsibility for its arts, entertainment, parks and recreation.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

When we passed Elevate with the full support of the Chamber, we made a commitment that Elevate would not be used for General Fund (GF) operations. I have not wavered on this.

No one could anticipate COVID-19 and its impact on the economy and the City's budget. Although my FY 2021 budget recommendation did not include the use of Elevate funds for the GF, the Council decided upon another course that was veto proof. However, during the negotiations, I added a provision to pay the money back that will be essential in keeping Elevate whole in the future.

I have and continue to be committed to the Elevate Advisory Council which is comprised of 40 community members across our City. From analyzing the projects to ensuring the City's return on investment, community and sustainability, EAC will be a driving factor in my recommendations to the Tuscaloosa City Council (Council).

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

The Tuscaloosa National Airport (TCL) stands ready to ascend by expanding on its current mission of being a home to fuel based flight operations, charter flights and a shipping channel for MBUSI suppliers and the adjacent industrial park.

Through Elevate, and the leveraging of FAA funds, Runway 04-22 will be completely rebuilt and upgraded. When complete, this new 6,500-foot runway will create more opportunity for commercial flights and MBUSI suppliers' cargo.

Elevate will also lay the groundwork for future commercial air service at the airport conducting a leakage study to look at current passenger use of airports in our region, determining traffic volumes, carriers used, and fares paid. The market research involves a survey of the community to determine travel behaviors, demand for air travel, and other important factors.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the fire largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

Like most major cities, Tuscaloosa's mayor is the chief executive officer, with the power to appoint department heads, recommend budgets and veto ordinances. However, Tuscaloosa mayor has two features that combined make it different. First, the mayor is also the chief administrative officer. Second, the mayor also oversees the City's water and sewer operations. Clearly, who we elect as mayor matters in the financial management of the City.

The City's credit ratings have risen under my administration even through the Great Recession, April 27, 2011 tornado and COVID-19. Today, the City is AAA rated by Fitch. In addition, since 2010, the City's fund balance has grown by over \$60 million dollars even while we have a balanced budget every year.

As we come out of the shadow of COVID-19, we will look to further streamline operations by leveraging technology.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

As mayor, I was proud to be named the municipal leader of year in 2012. This recognition reflects an amazing team that manages \$600 billion in total public assets, \$238 million dollar operating budget and a \$162.1 million capital budget. By every measure, and through every challenge, we have been effective in our operation and never had one hint of scandal.

The day-to-day management of the City's operations are complex, and every decision has consequences. But it is in moments of crisis where calm, determined and decisive leadership matters. As mayor, I have navigated our city through the destructive winds of Mother Nature while ensuring peaceful protest during moments of social unrest. Crisis will find every mayor, and I believe my record of proven leadership makes me the best qualified candidate.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: Mayor

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

In 2030, because of our investments into education we have every student career and college ready when they receive their high school degrees. Our economy will be even more diverse taking advantage of the intellectual talent from Shelton State, Stillman College and the University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa's infrastructure will not only reinforced and expanded it will be creating more residential growth and jobs. Lastly, the investments through Project Unity and Elevate will have lowered juvenile crime while vastly upgrading our education system, parks, recreation, TCL and cultural arts.